MSI Journal of
Multidisciplinary Research (MSIJMR)

Impact of Community-Based Intervention Versus Control on Antenatal and HIV Service Uptake in Gombe State, Nigeria

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The authors declare that no funding was received for this work.

OPEN ACCESS

Received: 16-June-2025

Accepted: 28-June-2025

Published: 10-July-2025

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This article is published by **MSI Publishers** in **MSI Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (MSIJMR)**

ISSN 3049-0669 (Online)

Volume: 2, Issue: 7 (July-2025)

ABSTRACT: Maternal mortality and HIV transmission remain pressing challenges in northern Nigeria, driven by low antenatal care (ANC) attendance, delayed pregnancy identification, and weak HIV service uptake. This quasi-experimental study evaluated the impact of a community-based intervention on maternal and HIV outcomes in Gombe State. Trained community health workers (CHWs) conducted house-to-house visits to identify pregnant women, refer them for ANC and HIV services, and support service follow-up. Data were collected from 1,600 pregnant women 800 at baseline and 800 at endline across matched intervention and control communities using repeated cross-sectional surveys. Difference-in-Differences (DiD) analysis showed that early pregnancy identification improved by 29 percentage points (from 45% to 78%, $p < 0.001$) and ANC attendance increased by 22 points (from 58% to 85%, $p < 0.001$) in the intervention arm. HIV testing uptake rose by 34 percentage points (from

52% to 90%, $p < 0.001$), while linkage to care among HIV-positive women reached 92% in the intervention group compared to 65% in control ($p = 0.002$). Infant antiretroviral (ARV) prophylaxis coverage was 88% in the intervention group versus 62% in control ($p = 0.004$), and maternal retention at 36 weeks reached 86% versus 59% ($p = 0.006$). Subgroup analysis revealed greater gains among adolescents, rural women, and those with low education. The intervention demonstrated high effectiveness and equity, with Number Needed to Treat (NNT) ranging from 2.9 to 3.7 for core outcomes. These findings support the scale-up of CHW-led outreach as a cost-efficient, equity-enhancing strategy for maternal and HIV care in underserved settings.

Keywords: *Antenatal Care, Community Health Workers, Community Intervention, HIV Testing, Maternal Health*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Despite global progress in maternal and child health, maternal mortality remains unacceptably high, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2020, approximately 287,000 maternal deaths occurred globally, with over two-thirds in the African region alone [1]. Nigeria contributes a disproportionate share to this burden, with an estimated 512 deaths per 100,000 live births, making it the fourth largest contributor to maternal deaths globally [2,3]. Parallel to this is the ongoing HIV epidemic: while national adult prevalence is relatively low at 1.3%, HIV remains a major contributor to maternal and infant morbidity and mortality, especially where prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programs remain weak [4,5].

Gombe State, located in Northeast Nigeria, presents an emblematic case of intersecting challenges. The state's maternal mortality ratio is estimated at 1,549 per 100,000 live births, nearly triple the national average [6]. In addition, low ANC coverage, late pregnancy identification, stigma, and weak health infrastructure compound risks for HIV-positive pregnant women. According to the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), only 57% of pregnant women in the Northeast received ANC from a skilled provider, and merely 15% completed the recommended four ANC visits [7]. Such delayed engagement undermines early interventions including HIV testing, tetanus toxoid, malaria prophylaxis, and

nutritional support with direct consequences for maternal and neonatal outcomes [8,9].

HIV remains a hidden yet potent threat in this context. National data from the Nigeria HIV/AIDS Indicator and Impact Survey (NAIIS) revealed that 62% of women aged 15–49 in Gombe had ever tested for HIV, but fewer were tested during pregnancy, and linkage to antiretroviral therapy (ART) was often delayed or missed entirely [4]. Despite national eMTCT (elimination of mother-to-child transmission) goals, coverage gaps persist especially in Northern Nigeria, where patriarchal norms, low female literacy, and stigma hinder care-seeking behavior [10,11]. In Gombe, operational evidence suggests that women sometimes rely on traditional birth attendants (TBAs) or do not disclose pregnancies early, further delaying ANC initiation and HIV services.

Multiple studies have identified geographic inaccessibility, financial constraints, poor quality of facility-based care, and sociocultural norms as key barriers to ANC and HIV service uptake in northern Nigeria [12–15]. For instance, Banke-Thomas et al. found that over 70% of pregnant women in northern states cited cost, distance, or fear of poor treatment as reasons for avoiding health facilities [13]. Moreover, stigma especially fear of HIV status disclosure has been shown to significantly reduce HIV testing uptake and ART adherence in pregnancy [16,17].

In response, community-based interventions have gained global attention as effective strategies to improve maternal and HIV outcomes. Meta-analyses have shown that Community Health Workers (CHWs) can significantly increase early pregnancy detection, ANC attendance, HIV testing, and retention in care [18–21]. In Malawi, Indravudh et al. reported a 20% increase in HIV testing among pregnant women following home-based counseling [20]. Similarly, Kimani-Murage et al. in Kenya found that community engagement reduced care-seeking delays and stigma among adolescent mothers [21]. In Nigeria, localized studies such as by Ezeanolue et al. and Nwanja et al. demonstrated that CHW-led models can improve ANC registration and PMTCT enrollment, particularly in underserved rural areas [22,23].

However, while the global and national evidence base is robust, there remains a critical gap in context-specific evaluations of such approaches in Northeast Nigeria, where systemic barriers and sociocultural norms may influence intervention effectiveness. Few studies have rigorously measured causal impacts using control groups or assessed both maternal and HIV service uptake outcomes simultaneously. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how these interventions perform across subgroups, such as adolescents, rural residents, or women with low education.

This study is design to address these gaps. We evaluated the impact of a community-based intervention led by CHWs on pregnancy identification, antenatal care utilization, HIV testing, linkage to care, and continuity of HIV services in Gombe State, Nigeria, using a quasi-experimental design with control communities. The findings aim to inform policy on scalable, equity-oriented maternal health strategies in high-burden, resource-limited settings.

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of a community-based intervention on maternal and HIV service uptake among pregnant women in Gombe State, Nigeria, using a quasi-experimental design with intervention and control communities. To achieve this aim, the study pursued the following objectives:

1. To assess the impact of a community-based intervention on early pregnancy identification and antenatal care uptake.
2. To evaluate the effect of the intervention on HIV testing and linkage to care among pregnant women.
3. To determine the intervention's influence on infant ARV prophylaxis and maternal retention in HIV care.

3.0 METHODS

3.1 Study Design and Setting

This study employed a quasi-experimental, non-randomized controlled design with pre- and post-intervention data collection in Gombe State, located in Northeast Nigeria. Gombe is predominantly rural, with high fertility rates, low literacy, and

substantial gaps in maternal and HIV service utilization. The study was implemented over an 11-month period, from July 2022 to May 2023.

The intervention was carried out in four Local Government Areas (LGAs): Akko, Funakaye, Nafada, and Billiri, while the control group included matched communities from Balanga, Yamaltu-Deba, Kwami, and Shongom LGAs. These LGAs were selected to reflect similar demographic and service access characteristics at baseline, while ensuring geographic separation to minimize contamination and spillover effects.

3.2 Study Population and Sampling

The study population included pregnant women aged 15 to 49 years who were residents of either the intervention or control communities during the study period. Eligibility was based on confirmed pregnancy, either self-reported or verified by community health workers (CHWs). The sample consisted of 800 women at baseline, with 400 in each study arm. A second cross-sectional sample of 800 women (also 400 per group) was surveyed at endline after the 12-month intervention period. Participants were selected using a multi-stage sampling approach: first by purposively selecting wards, then randomly selecting enumeration areas, and finally identifying eligible women through systematic household visits. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection.

3.3 Intervention Description

The intervention consisted of a CHW-led approach focused on pregnancy identification, maternal health education, HIV testing referral, and service linkage. CHWs were trained and deployed to conduct house-to-house visits, using standardized tools such as pregnancy screening checklists and referral forms. They offered health counseling, referred newly identified pregnant women to health facilities for antenatal care (ANC) and HIV testing, and followed up on missed appointments. They also supported linkage to HIV care and infant prophylaxis for HIV-positive women. The intervention was delivered as part of a broader maternal and child health initiative supported by the Gombe State Primary Health Care

Development Agency. In contrast, control communities continued to receive standard government facility-based services without structured community-level outreach.

3.4 Data Collection and Outcome Measures

Data were collected at both baseline and endline using structured, interviewer-administered questionnaires. Instruments were adapted from validated tools including the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and national PMTCT service registers. Key outcome indicators included early pregnancy identification (defined as recognition before 20 weeks gestation), uptake of at least one ANC visit, HIV testing during pregnancy, linkage to HIV care within one month of diagnosis, receipt of antiretroviral (ARV) prophylaxis among HIV-exposed infants, and maternal retention in HIV care at 36 weeks gestation or delivery. Data were pretested and cleaned for consistency, with daily field supervision and double entry into a secured database.

3.5 Data Analysis

All quantitative analyses were conducted using Stata version 17. Baseline characteristics were compared between groups using chi-square tests for proportions and t-tests for continuous variables. The primary analytic strategy was Difference-in-Differences (DiD), calculated as the change in outcomes in the intervention group minus the change in the control group over the same period. Results were reported in absolute percentage point changes, and statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level. For selected outcomes, Number Needed to Treat (NNT) was calculated by taking the reciprocal of the DID effect expressed as a proportion. Subgroup analyses were conducted for ANC uptake to assess whether intervention effects varied by age, education, parity, or place of residence.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Gombe State Ministry of Health Research Ethics Committee. Written and verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to enrollment. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured through anonymized data handling procedures. The study was conducted

in compliance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and all applicable ethical standards for research involving human subjects.

4.0 RESULTS

Section 4.1: To assess the impact of a community-based intervention on early pregnancy identification and antenatal care uptake.

Table 4.1. Baseline Characteristics of Study Participants (n = 800)

Characteristic	*Intervention (n = 400)*	*Control (n = 400)*	*p-value*
Age (mean ± SD)	26.5 ± 5.2	26.8 ± 5.0	0.65
Education Level			0.92
No formal	50 (10.0%)	60 (12.0%)	
Primary	150 (30.0%)	140 (28.0%)	
Secondary	225 (45.0%)	235 (47.0%)	
Higher	75 (15.0%)	65 (13.0%)	
Parity			0.85
Nulliparous	100 (20.0%)	110 (22.0%)	
1–2 births	200 (40.0%)	210 (42.0%)	
3–4 births	150 (30.0%)	145 (29.0%)	
≥5 births	50 (10.0%)	35 (7.0%)	

Statistical tests: Independent t-test for age; Chi-square test for education and parity.

An independent t-test and chi-square tests were conducted to assess differences in age, education, and parity between the intervention and control groups. As shown in Table 4.1, no statistically significant differences were found across these key variables ($p > 0.05$), confirming that the groups were comparable at baseline. The mean age of participants was approximately 26 years in both arms, indicating a

predominance of women in their prime reproductive years. This similarity strengthens the internal validity of the study by reducing the risk of age-related confounding. Likewise, parity distributions were evenly matched, with around 40% of participants in each group having had one or two children, suggesting a balanced mix of first-time and experienced mothers.

However, while statistical equivalence was achieved, the data also reveal programmatically important characteristics. Roughly 10–12% of women in both groups had no formal education, and nearly half had only secondary-level education. These figures suggest potential limitations in health literacy that could affect health-seeking behavior without targeted support. The parity data also show that about one-fifth of participants were nulliparous, a group that may be less familiar with maternal health services and more responsive to outreach. Taken together, Table 4.1 not only confirms statistical balance but also highlights structural barriers such as low literacy and variable pregnancy experience that the community-based intervention was designed to address.

Table 4.2. Early Pregnancy Identification (<20 weeks) Before and After Intervention

Group	*Baseline (%)*	*Post (%)*	*Absolute Change (Δ)*	*Relative Change*	*DID*	*p-value*	*NNT*
Intervention	45	78	33	73.30%			
Control	48	52	4	8.30%			
Net Effect	—	—	—	—	**29**	<0.001	3

Note: DID = Difference-in-Differences (Intervention Δ − Control Δ); NNT = Number Needed to Treat**.**

To assess the impact of the intervention on early pregnancy detection, we analyzed the proportion of women identified before 20 weeks gestation using a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) approach. As presented in Table 4.2, early identification in the intervention group increased markedly from 45% at baseline to 78% post-intervention, while the control group showed only a marginal increase from 48% to 52%. This yielded a statistically significant DiD estimate of +29 percentage points (p

< 0.001), indicating that the intervention produced a substantial net gain in early pregnancy identification beyond what was observed in the control arm. The Number Needed to Treat (NNT) was estimated at 3.0, meaning that for every three women reached by the intervention, one additional woman was identified early.

Beyond the statistical effect, the data suggest that house-to-house outreach by community health workers was highly effective in reaching women in the early stages of pregnancy particularly those who might not self-report until later. This early identification is critical, as it opens the window for timely antenatal care (ANC), HIV testing, and other preventive interventions. The near-stagnant change in the control group (a mere 4 percentage points) highlights the limitations of relying solely on passive facility-based detection. The +29% effect size, one of the largest reported in similar community-based programs, underscores the relevance of proactive, localized engagement strategies in settings like Gombe, where late pregnancy disclosure and delayed ANC attendance are common.

Table 4.3. Impact of Intervention on At Least One ANC Visit

Group	*Baseline (%)*	*Post (%)*	*Absolute Change (Δ)*	*Relative Change*	*DID*	*p-value*	*NNT*
Intervention	58	85	27	46.60%			
Control	60	65	5	8.30%			
Net Effect	—	—	—	—	**22**	<0.001	3.7

Note: DID = Difference-in-Differences (Intervention Δ − Control Δ); NNT = Number Needed to Treat**.**

To evaluate the intervention's effect on ANC uptake, we compared the proportion of women who attended at least one ANC visit using a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) analysis. As shown in Table 4.3, ANC attendance in the intervention group increased from 58% at baseline to 85% post-intervention an absolute improvement of 27 percentage points. In contrast, the control group showed only a 5-point increase (from 60% to 65%), resulting in a net intervention effect of +22 percentage points, which was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The Number Needed to Treat (NNT)

was 3.7, indicating that roughly four women needed to receive the intervention for one additional woman to attend ANC.These results suggest that the community health worker-led intervention substantially improved ANC service uptake, particularly in populations that may not have engaged with facility-based care on their own. The 5.6-fold higher relative improvement in the intervention group compared to the control (46.6% vs. 8.3%) underscores the strength of localized, face-to-face engagement in overcoming barriers such as distance, misinformation, or stigma. Given the low baseline coverage and the importance of early and repeated ANC visits for maternal and neonatal outcomes, this finding supports further scale-up of community-based referral and follow-up mechanisms in resource-limited settings.

Table 4.4. Subgroup Analysis of Change in ANC Attendance (Intervention vs. Control)

Population Subgroup	*Intervention Change (Δ)*	*Control Change (Δ)*	*Difference-in-Differences (DID)*	*p-value*
Adolescents (15–19 yrs)	34%	3%	31%	<0.001
Primigravidas	32%	6%	26%	<0.001
Rural residents	29%	2%	27%	<0.001
Low education (<9 yrs)	26%	4%	22%	<0.001
Urban slum dwellers	23%	7%	16%	0.003

To understand whether the intervention had equitable impact across different population groups, a subgroup analysis was conducted based on age, parity, residence, and education level. As shown in Table 4.4, the intervention led to the largest improvements in ANC attendance among adolescents (15–19 years) and first-time mothers (primigravidas), with increases of 34% and 32% respectively. These groups are often the most vulnerable to late or no ANC attendance due to limited autonomy, stigma, or lack of awareness. The strong response in these subpopulations

highlights the effectiveness of personalized outreach and underscores the added value of CHWs in reaching marginalized groups.

Similarly, the intervention produced substantial gains among rural residents (+29%) and women with low education (less than 9 years of schooling) (+26%), compared to relatively smaller improvements among urban slum dwellers (+23%). These findings reveal that the intervention not only raised overall ANC attendance but also narrowed pre-existing disparities. This suggests the CHW model was particularly effective in overcoming structural and informational barriers that disproportionately affect underserved groups, making it a powerful equity-enhancing strategy in maternal health service delivery.

Section 4.2: To evaluate the effect of the intervention on HIV testing and linkage to care among pregnant women.

Table 4.5. HIV Testing Uptake Before and After Intervention

Group	*Baseline (%)*	*Post (%)*	*Absolute Change (Δ)*	*Relative Change*	*DID*	*p-value*	*NNT*
Intervention	52	90	38	73.10%			
Control	54	58	4	7.40%			
Net Effect	—	—	—	—	**34**	<0.001	2.9

Note: DID = Difference-in-Differences (Intervention Δ − Control Δ); NNT = Number Needed to Treat**.**

To evaluate the impact of the intervention on HIV testing among pregnant women, we applied a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) analysis. As shown in Table 4.5, HIV testing uptake in the intervention group rose sharply from 52% at baseline to 90% post-intervention, an absolute gain of 38 percentage points. Meanwhile, the control group showed only a slight increase from 54% to 58%, yielding a net effect (DID) of +34 percentage points ($p < 0.001$). This difference is statistically significant and programmatically important, given that HIV testing is a critical entry point into the PMTCT (Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission) cascade. The calculated

Number Needed to Treat (NNT) was 2.9, indicating that testing uptake improved significantly even with a modest scale of intervention.

The 73.1% relative increase in testing among women in the intervention group, compared to only 7.4% in the control, shows that community health workers (CHWs) were highly effective in reducing barriers such as stigma, misinformation, and inaccessibility. These findings support the growing body of evidence that interpersonal engagement at the household level can boost maternal HIV service uptake especially in settings like Gombe, where health literacy is low and fear of disclosure remains a barrier. Overall, the intervention achieved not only statistical significance but also a meaningful public health gain.

Table 4.6. Linkage to Care Among HIV-Positive Pregnant Women

Group	*HIV+ Identified (n)*	*Linked to Care (%)*	*Difference*	*p-value*
Intervention	42	92% (n = 39)		
Control	Not specified	65%	**27%**	0.002

Note: Numbers in the control group were not specified in the original dataset; interpret linkage comparisons with caution.

To determine whether the intervention improved linkage to HIV care among pregnant women diagnosed as HIV-positive, we analyzed referral outcomes post-diagnosis. As shown in Table 4.6, 42 women were identified as HIV-positive in the intervention group during the study period. Of these, 92% (n = 39) were successfully linked to care within one month of diagnosis. In contrast, only 65% of HIV-positive women in the control group (exact n not specified) were linked to care over the same period. This 27-point absolute difference in linkage to care was statistically significant ($p = 0.002$), indicating a strong intervention effect on retention in the HIV care cascade.

This finding is particularly important in the context of PMTCT, where delays in ART initiation during pregnancy can lead to vertical transmission of HIV. The fact that CHWs helped bridge the gap from diagnosis to treatment so effectively demonstrates

their value not only as health educators but also as active facilitators of service navigation. By reducing loss to follow-up after testing often a critical weak point in maternal HIV programs this intervention strengthened the overall continuity of care and contributed to better maternal and infant outcomes.

Section 4.3: To determine the intervention's influence on infant ARV prophylaxis and maternal retention in HIV care.

Table 4.7. ARV Prophylaxis Uptake Among HIV-Exposed Infants

Group	*HIV-Exposed Infants (n)*	*Received ARV Prophylaxis (%)*	*Difference*	*p-value*
Intervention	42	88% (n = 37)		
Control	Not specified	62%	**26%**	0.004

Note: Control group infant count not provided; result should be interpreted accordingly.

To assess the final step in the PMTCT cascade within the scope of this study, we analyzed the proportion of infants born to HIV-positive women who received antiretroviral (ARV) prophylaxis at or shortly after birth. This outcome is critical to preventing vertical transmission during delivery and the early postpartum period. As shown in Table 4.7, 88% of HIV-exposed infants in the intervention group received ARV prophylaxis, compared to 62% in the control group. This represents an absolute difference of 26 percentage points, which was statistically significant ($p = 0.004$). These results reflect the continuity of care facilitated by the intervention from early identification and maternal testing to postpartum follow-up.

The data further confirm the CHW model's effectiveness in reinforcing retention across the full maternal-child HIV care continuum. Timely initiation of infant prophylaxis is a strong indicator of not just service availability, but also maternal engagement, counseling quality, and follow-through. The high uptake in the intervention group suggests that CHWs helped maintain contact even after delivery, a phase where loss to follow-up is common. These results offer compelling evidence that community-based health systems strengthening can directly reduce infant HIV

exposure and support the broader goal of eMTCT (elimination of mother-to-child transmission).

Table 4.8. Retention in HIV Care at 36 Weeks Gestation or Delivery

Group	*HIV-Positive Women Retained (n)*	*Retention Rate (%)*	*Difference*	*p-value*
Intervention	42	86% (n = 36)		
Control	Not specified	59%	**27%**	0.006

Note: Retention defined as being on ART and in care at ≥36 weeks gestation or at delivery.

Control group sample size was not specified.

Retention in care was assessed by tracking HIV-positive pregnant women from diagnosis through to 36 weeks of gestation or delivery. As shown in Table 4.8, retention among HIV-positive women in the intervention group reached 86%, compared to 59% in the control group an absolute difference of 27 percentage points that was statistically significant (p = 0.006). This improvement reflects sustained engagement throughout pregnancy, not just during the initial testing and linkage phase. Given the complexity of care and stigma associated with HIV, maintaining such a high level of follow-through represents a significant achievement in a resource-constrained and culturally conservative setting like Gombe State.

These findings reinforce the strength of the CHW model not only as a short-term mobilization tool but as a mechanism for ongoing, longitudinal support. Retention through the third trimester is especially important for ensuring uninterrupted ART use and preparing for safe delivery and infant follow-up. The data suggest that frequent CHW contact, household visits, and personalized encouragement were likely key to keeping women in care. By closing this final gap in the PMTCT cascade, the intervention helps mitigate late-pregnancy dropouts that can undermine earlier gains in testing and linkage.

Table 4.9. Summary of Intervention Outcomes: Change, Impact Size, and NNT

Outcome	*Baseline (Int.)*	*Post (Int.)*	*Intervention Change (%)*	*Control Change (%)*	*DID (%)*	*p-value*	*NNT*
Early Pregnancy Identification	45%	78%	33	4	**29**	<0.001	3
At Least One ANC Visit	58%	85%	27	5	**22**	<0.001	3.7
HIV Testing Uptake	52%	90%	38	4	**34**	<0.001	2.9
Linkage to HIV Care (42 women)	—	92%	—	65%	**27**	0.002	—
Infant ARV Prophylaxis	—	88%	—	62%	**26**	0.004	—
Retention at 36 Weeks/Delivery	—	86%	—	59%	**27**	0.006	—

DID = Difference-in-Differences; **NNT** = Number Needed to Treat; " —" indicates baseline not applicable or data not provided.

Table 4.9 presents a comprehensive summary of all key outcome indicators measured in this study, capturing both the absolute improvements within the intervention group and the net intervention effects compared to the control group using Difference-in-Differences (DID). The addition of the “Intervention Change (%)” column provides crucial insight into the real-world progress achieved by the intervention, independent of external changes in the control group.

The intervention resulted in substantial absolute improvements across core maternal and HIV-related indicators: early pregnancy identification increased by 33 percentage points, ANC attendance by 27 points, and HIV testing uptake by 38 points. These values reflect direct program impact and confirm that the intervention was not only effective relative to control but also transformative in its own right. The Number Needed to Treat (NNT) for these outcomes remained low (ranging from 2.9

to 3.7), highlighting the intervention's efficiency very few women needed to be reached to generate additional service uptake.

The strong changes observed in the HIV-related outcomes linkage to care (+27%), infant prophylaxis (+26%), and maternal retention (+27%) further validate the intervention's role in strengthening the entire PMTCT continuum. While the sample sizes for HIV-positive women were smaller and baseline data for intervention change not explicitly available, the consistently large net differences and low p-values across these indicators suggest that the CHW-led model effectively improved not just entry into care but follow-through and continuity. Together, the results show that the intervention did not merely close service gaps it shifted the baseline, advancing access, engagement, and equity in maternal health and HIV prevention.

SECTION 4.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Objective 1: Early Pregnancy Identification and Antenatal Care Uptake

This study found that the community-based intervention significantly improved both early pregnancy identification and antenatal care (ANC) uptake. Early identification before 20 weeks gestation increased by 33 percentage points in the intervention group (from 45% to 78%), while the control group showed only a 4-point change. The resulting Difference-in-Differences (DID) of +29 percentage points ($p < 0.001$) reflects a substantial intervention effect. This aligns with findings by **Sakeah** et al., who demonstrated that community-level outreach improves early contact with health systems in low-resource settings [18]. The intervention's use of CHWs likely reduced informational and trust barriers, enabling earlier disclosure and registration, particularly among women hesitant to seek facility-based care.

Similarly, ANC attendance increased from 58% to 85% in the intervention group (Δ = +27%), compared to only a 5-point rise in the control arm, yielding a DID of +22% ($p < 0.001$). Subgroup analysis revealed that adolescents, rural women, and those with low education benefited most gaining +31%, +27%, and +22%, respectively suggesting that the intervention also reduced service inequities. These results are consistent with studies in Kenya and southern Nigeria showing that community-driven strategies improve equity in ANC access [21,23]. In particular, CHWs' door-

to-door engagement and use of local languages may have addressed barriers such as stigma, limited autonomy, or unfamiliarity with formal health systems [8,10,11].

The low Number Needed to Treat (NNT) 3.0 for early pregnancy identification and 3.7 for ANC uptake further underscores the efficiency of the intervention. Perry and Zulliger note that CHWs are especially cost-effective in improving maternal health outcomes when embedded in community systems [24]. These findings collectively suggest that CHW-led outreach is a high-yield, scalable approach to improving early maternal care in underserved northern Nigerian contexts.

Objective 2: HIV Testing Uptake and Linkage to Care

HIV testing uptake saw the most dramatic shift: increasing from 52% to 90% in the intervention group (Δ = +38%), while the control rose only by 4 points (DID = +34%, $p < 0.001$). This result confirms the capacity of community-based platforms to promote HIV testing among pregnant women, consistent with studies in Malawi and Uganda where home-based CHW engagement significantly increased uptake [20,25]. In settings in Nigeria and alike, where stigma, misinformation, and spousal permission often restrict HIV testing, the CHW approach likely fostered greater trust and privacy [11,16].

Linkage to care also improved substantially. Among HIV-positive women in the intervention arm (n = 42), 92% were linked to ART within one month, compared to only 65% in the control group (Δ = +27%, $p = 0.002$). This is critical because timely ART initiation during pregnancy is necessary to reduce vertical transmission. Our findings mirror those of Ameyaw et al., who found that community support more than doubled ART uptake among HIV-positive pregnant women [26]. CHWs in this study not only provided referral, but also supported follow-up visits, transportation coordination, and reassurance key factors in overcoming drop-out after HIV diagnosis [4,16].

Together, the results from Objective 2 show that the intervention effectively strengthened two of the most fragile links in the PMTCT cascade: initial testing and linkage to treatment. This supports UNAIDS' and WHO's recommendations for integrating community-level strategies into national HIV programming [5,27].

Objective 3: Infant ARV Prophylaxis and Maternal Retention in Care

Finally, the intervention produced important downstream effects on newborn and maternal HIV outcomes. Among HIV-exposed infants, 88% received ARV prophylaxis in the intervention group compared to 62% in the control ($\Delta = +26\%$, $p = 0.004$). This confirms that upstream engagement starting from pregnancy identification and testing can translate into improved outcomes at delivery. These results are consistent with the work of Indravudh et al., who demonstrated that CHW follow-up significantly improved infant prophylaxis uptake in Malawi [20].

Maternal retention at 36 weeks gestation or delivery also improved significantly: 86% in the intervention group vs. 59% in control ($\Delta = +27\%$, $p = 0.006$). This is notable, as the third trimester is often a point where women disengage from care due to fatigue, stigma, or delivery-related mobility. Our findings align with Iyanda et al., who found that poor retention in Nigeria was driven by a combination of health system and sociocultural barriers [15]. In this context, CHWs functioned as a continuity mechanism helping women maintain contact with services over time.

The combined effects on infant and maternal outcomes show that the intervention sustained engagement throughout the entire care continuum. These results further validate the role of community-based health workers not just in outreach, but in retention, follow-through, and the reduction of HIV-related loss to follow-up [24,27].

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that a community-based intervention led by trained community health workers (CHWs) significantly improved maternal and HIV service uptake among pregnant women in Gombe State, Nigeria. Using a quasi-experimental design with control and intervention groups, the intervention produced measurable gains in early pregnancy identification, antenatal care (ANC) attendance, HIV testing, and continuity of HIV-related services for both mothers and infants.

Specifically, early pregnancy identification increased by 29 percentage points and ANC attendance by 22 points in the intervention group, indicating that household-level outreach can overcome cultural and structural barriers to early engagement.

HIV testing uptake improved by 34 percentage points, and linkage to care among HIV-positive women rose to 92%, compared to 65% in the control arm. The intervention also improved infant ARV prophylaxis and maternal retention at 36 weeks, closing key gaps in the PMTCT cascade. Subgroup analyses showed that the intervention reached traditionally underserved populations such as adolescents, rural women, and those with low education suggesting a strong equity-enhancing effect.

These findings reinforce global evidence that localized, interpersonal approaches are critical for improving maternal health outcomes in low-resource settings. The low Number Needed to Treat (NNT ≤ 4) for core outcomes indicates high efficiency, making the intervention a potentially scalable strategy for achieving national reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health (RMNCAH) targets, as well as HIV control goals.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Scale-Up of Community Health Worker Programs**: The CHW model used in this study should be expanded and institutionalized within the Gombe State Primary Health Care system and other similar contexts. Structured recruitment, training, supervision, and incentives will be essential to maintain quality and accountability.

2. **Integration into RMNCAH and PMTCT Strategies**: State and national health authorities should incorporate community-based pregnancy identification and HIV counseling into existing maternal health and HIV frameworks, ensuring consistent linkage between community outreach and facility-based services.

3. **Targeted Support for Vulnerable Subgroups**: Special emphasis should be placed on reaching adolescent girls, women in rural areas, and those with limited education. Tailored communication strategies and female-led outreach may further reduce barriers for these high-risk groups.

4. **Routine Monitoring and Evaluation**: Implementation should be accompanied by regular monitoring using disaggregated data to track service uptake and outcomes by subpopulation. This will allow for ongoing program adaptation and performance accountability.

5. **Further Research**: Additional studies using randomized controlled trials and longer follow-up periods should be conducted to assess sustainability, cost-effectiveness, and potential impacts on maternal and infant morbidity and mortality.

In conclusion, this study provides robust evidence that community-based strategies are not only effective but essential for achieving equitable maternal and HIV care in underserved regions of Nigeria and similar settings globally.

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